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Our Story

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CASE STUDY
MUSD PBL Ecosystem Development

Applying Design Thinking to Transformative Educational Innovation

The Madera Unified School District (MUSD) envisioned a bold leap forward: a comprehensive, research-ready **Project-Based Learning (PBL) website and companion branding** that quickly evolved into an ecosystem to enhance education for its diverse community. The project aimed to integrate innovative tools and methodologies, supporting **four key audiences: students, educators, parents, and the community.**
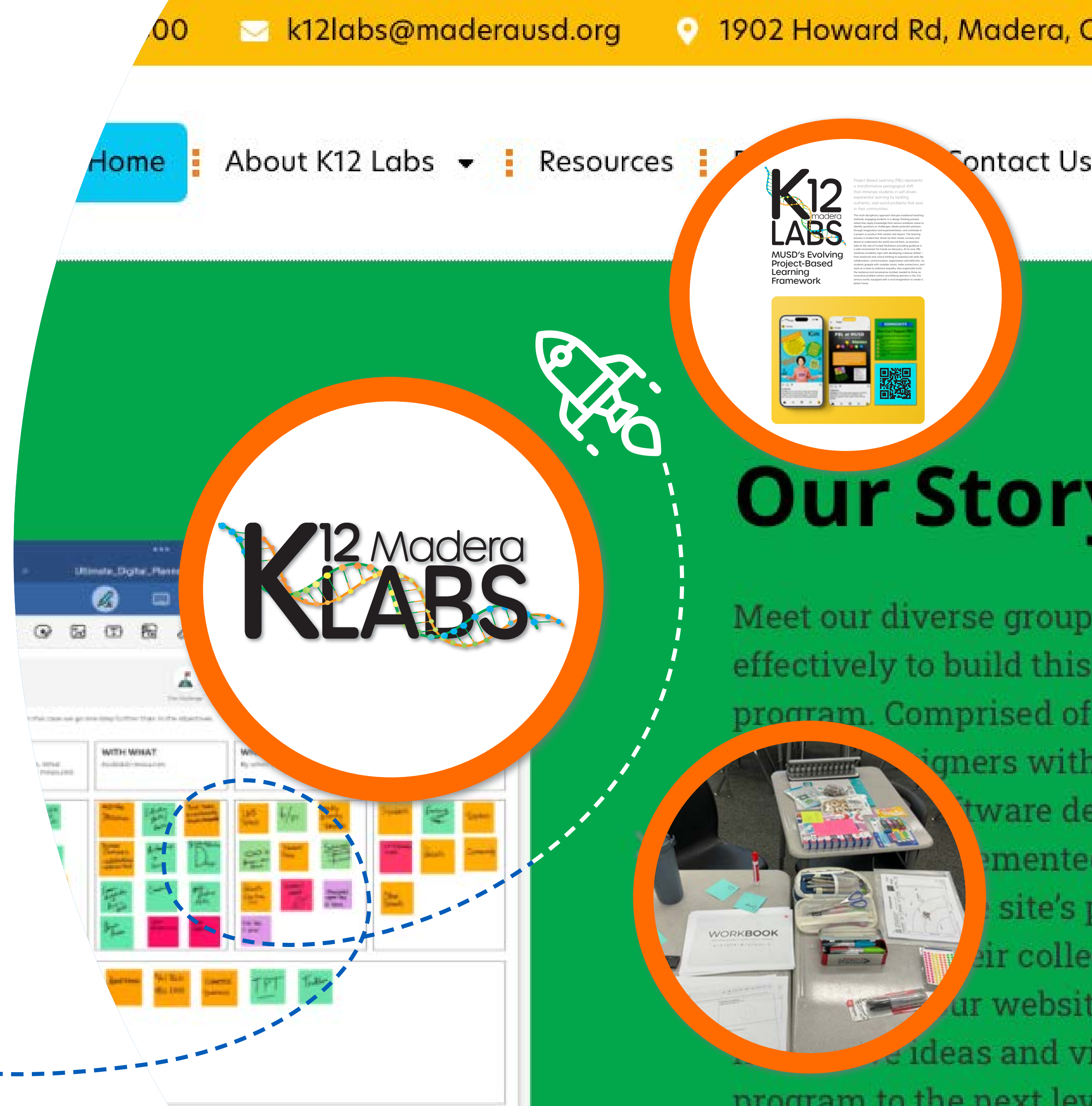
Workingarts was engaged to lead this transformative effort, beginning with a robust **website prototype** and extending into conceptualizing a dedicated PBL lab (vital to the research and testing components of the program), customizable educational tools, and a broader ecosystem to foster collaboration, creativity, and student-centered learning. However, leadership turnover and shifting priorities introduced significant challenges.

CHALLENGES & IDEAS

The initiative launched with enthusiasm under Superintendent Lile's directive to **"see where it goes,"** enabling unrestricted exploration of ideas. Through Design Thinking, the team prioritized empathy and collaboration:

- Conducting **stakeholder interviews** to identify pain points for teachers, students, and parents.

- Iteratively developing a **dynamic website prototype** tailored to support PBL projects.

- Referencing **Stanford's d.school's body of work in Design Thinking** to conceptualize a cutting-edge accelerator lab for PBL innovation.

- The team leader required a **framework document** to be included, which had not been written at the inception of this project. We wrote and designed a draft document.

Despite significant progress, the project encountered obstacles. Leadership changes led to reduced focus and disengagement, narrowing the vision from a dynamic public-facing platform to a limited intranet solution for teachers alone, sidelining other audiences, excluding the students, and disrupting the original vision.

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K12 madera LABS
MUSD's Evolving Project-Based Learning Framework

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THE BREAKTHROUGH

Key breakthroughs emerged from the project's Design Thinking framework:

A FUNCTIONAL WEBSITE PROTOTYPE

- Designed to **integrate PBL methodologies** and align with district goals.

- **Built for scalability,** supporting student collaboration, teacher resources, and community engagement.

CUSTOMIZABLE READER/WORKBOOKS

- **Conceptualized to empower students** to connect learning to real-world experiences.

- **Tailored to California education standards,** with interactive features and project guidelines.

- **Potential Collaboration** with Stanford's d.school to create the lab and seek funding sources for the project.

These innovations underscored the potential for a transformative educational ecosystem that could scale district-wide and beyond.

IMPLEMENTATION & REFINEMENT

The team embraced Design Thinking principles to iteratively refine solutions:

- **Empathy:** Engaged educators and parents to ensure tools addressed real needs.

- **Define and Ideate:** Aligned features with district goals, emphasizing usability and accessibility.

- **Prototype and Test:** Developed a functional website prototype and conceptualized future tools for collaboration and assessment.

However, the decision to reduce the scope to an intranet-only tool undercut the project's broader vision, leaving key components unrealized, as well as excluding key stakeholers.

THE OUTCOME

Despite challenges, the MUSD PBL Ecosystem laid critical groundwork:

- A dynamic website prototype positioned to **support PBL integration across curricula**

- Tools conceptualized to **personalize learning and empower educator**.

- A **Design Thinking methodology** demonstrated to effectively address complex challenges.

CLOSING REFLECTION

The MUSD PBL Ecosystem project reflects both the power of Design Thinking and the challenges of navigating shifting priorities in institutional leadership. Workingarts' **commitment to human-centered solutions and iterative innovation** stands as a model for educational transformation. The lessons learned here — and the tools developed—offer a foundation for future initiatives committed to inclusivity, creativity, and impact.

WANT TO SEE HOW EMPATHY-DRIVEN DESIGN CAN ELEVATE YOUR PRACTICE?
LET'S TALK.

workingarts
marketing, inc ™

p **+1 559 662 1119**
e **info@workingarts.com**
w **workingarts.com**